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ABSTRACT

A four-quarter extended school year plan in Buena Vista, Virginia, high schools is described in this paper. The voluntary program is composed of 3 quarters totaling 150 instructional hours, with an optional summer quarter. Advantages of the program include community/business support and student opportunities for remediation and acceleration. Outcomes have included improved standardized test scores, cost savings, teacher and student satisfaction, and a decreased dropout rate. Faculty (92%) and students (88%) support institutionalization of the extended year. A majority of faculty and students reported no effect on student extracurricular activities and family vacations. (LMI)

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A NATIONAL MODEL: A VOLUNTARY FOUR-QUARTER PLAN AT THE HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL

A PRESENTATION PREPARED FOR
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR YEAR-ROUND EDUCATION
23RD ANNUAL NATIONAL ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE
SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA

FEBRUARY 8-13, 1992

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Buena Vista is a small industrial city located 150 miles outside of Washington D.C., at the home of Washington & Lee University, Virginia Military Institute and Southern Seminary Jr. College for Women, next to U.S. Interstate 81, in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia.

High schools have something in common with the graveyards and that is you don't change or remove graveyards, and, likewise you don't change high schools. So in order to change the public high school we are going to have to discuss a plan to restructure its individual parts rather than the institution as a whole. Seeking ways of improving student's performance and raising academic standards is a concern of every state in this nation. In the 1930's we made a great decision when we decided to teach every American to write his/her name. Now, Americans have a new literacy standard. This new literacy standard requires that every American must be able to read, write, and decipher and read a "blue print." This new literacy standard is a mandate from the business and corporate sectors.

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The Nation at Risk addressed the reasons for educational reform by the identification of thirty-six educational issues in need of improvement. One of these issues was the need to extend the school year (Year-round Education). The extended school year can assist in providing the much needed time to enhance the quality of education and the quantity of education. The issues of saving money and of alleviating overcrowding are important, but are secondary reasons for the implementation of year-round schedules.

School districts should address the reform issues based on locally identified educational needs. Buena Vista addressed the issue from the viewpoint of what would be best for the children in an industrial community with a student population that profiles the bell curve in ability. The aspirations of the people included economic development and maintenance of a viable city that would have no future if it were not for the maintenance and the recruitment of new business and industry. The city's economy centers around ten major manufacturing plants.

In 1971-72, the superintendent spent a year studying the various year-round programs. The high school teachers and the principal spent another year reviewing the programs and looking for the best way to approach a system of year-round schooling. The administration and teachers felt that the traditional semester system was outdated and did not meet the educational needs of the city's high school students. Programs which offered an alternative were researched.

As part of the program reform movement, Virginia has increased the requirements for students to graduate from high school from 18 to 23 units of credit for the academic diploma. The 23 unit academic diploma requires the student to take six subjects for three of their four years of high school. These students will eagerly enroll in extended school year programs. The new academic diploma makes extended year an integral part of the high school program.

The exciting part about year-round education is that it includes courses for the average student, as well as for the gifted and the remedial students. We have a large group of students in the mid-section of the bell curve (seventy percent of the students are average).

In 1972-73, report cards were being issued to the students every nine weeks. The parents were excited about the quarter system issuing the report cards every six weeks.

The governance of American education is decentralized and no one person makes the final decision on matters of education. Many of us know everything about education; "How many of us are capable of writing a first grade speller?" Norman Brekke, past president of the National Association for Year-Round Education stated that there are two hundred forty-seven days in a school year available for instructional purposes. It is easy to divide the school year into four sixty-day blocks of time. Parental vacation is something that must be considered in planning year-round scheduling. Consideration must be given to the fact that the parents prefer a

four-season vacation schedule over the agrarian schedule.

A good way to introduce an extended school program is to begin with the word voluntary. Your plan may be in trouble if you announce the program as being mandatory. If you mandate the year-round schooling without prior planning and justification, your teachers and students are going to "rise up in arms."

In Virginia, the state legislature was funding the extended school year at a rate of $25.00 per pupil. The $25.00 didn't carry very much of a carrot to extend the school year so the state eliminated all funding for summer programs. In 1988-89 the state reinstated the funding to a level of $283.00 per pupil on an equalized or ability basis. The funds were allotted for each child that scored below the 25 percentile on standardized tests. In Virginia the summer school programs have increased in number during the past three years. If the state provides the money, the extended school year programs will follow. Many of the states will begin to encourage year-round education through the funding of extended-year programs.

Year-round education is a national issue. President George Bush chose Mr. Jefferson's home in Virginia as the place to introduce his Education Agenda. One of his initiatives includes voluntary extended school programs in every school district in America. Every school district is different and you cannot take one district's program and place it in another district because of this diversity. The educational needs of adjoining districts usually vary for many reasons. Buena Vista has an industrial

population with a diversified student population in need of programs for promotion, remediation, enrichment and acceleration.

The National Association for Year-round Education is an advocate for permissive legislation by the state and federal governments that encourages year-round education. The legislation should permit each local school district to make decisions about what is best for its children in the development of year-round programs. Each level of government must work together because we are America's Educational Team, and that is the only way year-round education will succeed. Buena Vista's extended school program has three quarters totaling 150 hours of instruction. The regular year has 180 hours of instruction. The extended school year does not have the interruption of clubs, ball games, and so forth. In 1969 we had 3% of our children enrolled in the traditional semester summer program. In 1973, the state board of education, school board, faculty, and students approved the four quarter voluntary extended school year for our high school. In the first year of operation we exceeded the enrollment goal of twenty-five percent of the regular day school pupils. The extended (quarter) program has enrolled forty-seven percent to fifty-eight percent of our regular high school students over the seventeen year period that the program has been in existence. The staff presented a radio program and was asked "would we reach eighty percent attendance in the extended school year?" Our response was "We did not think so." In 1990, each Virginia division superintendent was given the authority to mandate year-round schooling for all children that fell below

the twenty-fifth percentile. Buena Vista enacted the requirement without parental complaint.

When the school buildings are being used on a year-round basis, you get a more favorable response when asking for community support. The citizens respond with the statement, "Oh, you're year-round; that's wonderful." Business and industry favor year-round education for economic reasons. In America, we have over one-third of a trillion dollars worth of school buildings sitting vacant twenty-five percent of the time. And yet we have the child at risk, the need for the gifted, the need for the average child, the drop-out problem, and the business' need for skilled workers who can demonstrate proficiency in reading, writing and mathematics. About fifty percent of the Buena Vista students attending the summer quarter attend for promotion and remediation, and about fifty percent attend for enrichment and acceleration. In the traditional summer program three percent of the students were enrolled for remediation. You can continue the old agrarian model for scheduling the school calendar, but let's concede that it is outdated.

Buena Vista has about fifty juniors and seniors enrolled in the dual enrollment courses with students taking both high school and college courses. We have a relationship with Dabney S. Lancaster Community College that allows the high school students to take college courses taught by Buena Vista teachers and to receive credit at the high school and college level. These children can and do earn up to one year of college credit while in high school.

The dual enrollment tuition is paid by the school board. The teachers are employed by the college and by the school board as regular faculty members. The dual enrollment includes year-round classes. The dual enrollment program permits students to bridge the gap between high school and college. The students remain in their academic classes Tuesdays and Thursdays for additional help, and attend class on campus Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. All classes meet the standards of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. Our elected and governing officials think this program is one of the best programs we have implemented to improve the high school curriculum.

Regarding student age, eighty or ninety percent of the children in a school system are under eighteen years of age and are ineligible to work in most industries and businesses. Some students work to earn money for college; however, most do not. Therefore, you have a ready market to extend the school year.

Our standardized test scores have improved since implementation of the extended school year. I am not an advocate of National Standardized Test Scores, but each school official has had little choice but to deal with the issue.

Our annual per pupil costs are about four thousand five hundred dollars per pupil. If your principal is in place, guidance is in place, debt-service is in place, the buses are in place, drivers are in place and willing to drive on a twelve-month basis, usually the only two things that are not in place in a twelve-month program are the teachers and the students. Even textbooks are in

place. In the simplest terms -- you must bring the teachers and students into place. If you go about this on a voluntary basis the teachers will participate plus you will have a new market for people who want to teach on a part-time basis or want to have meaningful summer employment.

Parry McCluer High School, with a student body of 400, is employing three less teachers during the regular term. If we were to drop year-round education it would cost more to hire the three additional high school teachers than the extended school-year program costs. The average and accelerated students are an additional cost. The cost savings is such that the repeaters will help pay for the entire program.

Will teachers support institutionalization of extended year? Ninety-two percent of our faculty do not want this removed from the community, eighty-eight percent of our students do not want it removed. We had an independent survey that states that ninety percent of our citizens feel that we have a successful educational program.

In conclusion, the follow-up studies of the extended school year at the high school level (9-12) reveal that over fifty percent of our high school students attend year-round. The reasons for attending the year-round program are promotion, enrichment, acceleration and remediation. As a result of the year-round program the student achievement scores have increased to a level equal to or greater than the national average, there has been a financial savings to the taxpayers, and there has been a decline in

the drop-out rate with the exception of two years. A majority of the faculty and students report that the extended school year has not affected student extracurricular activities or interfered with family vacations.

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